

## 'The EDC's via dolorosa' from the Süddeutsche Zeitung (31 August 1954)

**Caption:** On 31 August 1954, in response to the failure of the European Defence Community (EDC), the German daily newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung criticises the opponents of the EDC project and recommends that thought be given to the errors committed.

**Source:** Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner Neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft und Sport. Hrsg. FRIEDMANN, Werner; GOLDSCHAGG, Edmund; SCHÖNINGH, Dr. Franz Joseph; SCHWINGENSTEIN, August. 31.08.1954, n° 200; 10. Jg. München: Süddeutscher Verlag. "Der Leidensweg der EVG", auteur: Birnbaum, Immanuel, p. 1.

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**Last updated:** 06/07/2016

## The EDC's via dolorosa

by Immanuel Birnbaum

The French National Assembly's final vote on the EDC has not yet taken place as this piece goes to press, but the bill must be considered doomed. Even the attempts of the French supporters of the Defence Community, headed by Teitgen, René Mayer and Guy Mollet, to persuade the Mendès France Government to open new negotiations with the treaty's other five signatory states do not give rise to any prospect that the project might be saved, once it became clear in the Brussels negotiations that an agreement over France's wishes for large-scale amendments was practically impossible. The years spent fighting about the EDC are coming to an end; the Defence Community will not become a reality as it stands.

Responsibility for this negative ending lies principally with France, whose Parliament repeatedly postponed ratification of the bill. Mendès France was not the most radical opponent of this Defence Community; he did not make acceptance or rejection of the original draft into a cabinet issue. Nor did he oppose German rearmament in principle; he simply tried to make it dependent on additional special advantages for France. His basic premise, which tactical manoeuvres made more obscure than clear, has been summarised as follows by a neutral observer of French politics: while France's finances are in disarray, its industry outdated and its leadership weak and unstable, it cannot become a cornerstone of Western European defence; *after* implementation of the present government's economic reform programme, the Prime Minister would have a better prospect of winning over most MPs and the nation to support an active role in the unification of Western Europe. The nationalists supporting General de Gaulle and General Koenig, the supporters of the Franco-Russian alliance endorsed by Herriot and Jules Moch who have not been deflected from their views by the disappointments they have suffered, and the still very strong French Communists would then certainly not be won over for any kind of cooperation on an equal footing with Germany. This time round, their fears and dislikes, the reasons for which are many and varied, have defeated the first incomplete attempt to create a defence community in the democratic part of Europe.

In Britain and the United States, there is no unilateral criticism of France. Those countries are becoming aware of their own responsibility for the failure of Western foreign policy in recent years. Voices in London bitterly remember the optimism with which Churchill and Eden described for far too long the establishment of a balance of power between East and West; they compare the confident prophesies of those Statesmen with the hard reality that the Soviet Union has not only become stronger in military terms on land and in the air but has recently outstripped Britain as a sea power and is now second only to the United States. The leading American newspaper *The New York Times* criticises Britain for having recommended the EDC while never wishing to involve itself in it for fear of its Western European competitors. What is more, the USA would have believed that the European countries would be capable of renouncing the national self-determination, which that Defence Community would have entailed, in a way that it would never accept for itself. These are laudable efforts at belated self-criticism. We in West Germany should not lag behind in this. We cannot get on our high horse and claim that we have completely fulfilled our duty. Have we not at least, through at times clumsy insistence on the EDC project, drawn up by the Frenchman, René Pleven, given the wrong impression that, for us, rearmament is a matter dear to our hearts – for the gratification of old military leanings or, possibly, for special foreign policy goals? Greater reticence would have served inner unity in this question and would also have instilled more trust in our neighbours.

Such insights may teach us a lesson for the future, because the question of defence of the part of Europe not controlled by Moscow is not resolved with the breakdown of the EDC; on the contrary, it has been framed in a different manner. After the success achieved at the Geneva Conference in putting a limit on the Eastern bloc's power in Asia, Moscow's recent diplomatic success has become twice as impressive because of the breakdown of Europe's common defence plan. There will have to be a reaction to that. Even a politician like Mendès France has yielded to the pressure and again committed himself to the Atlantic defence community and confirmed that a neutralisation of Germany is not in the West's interests.

The implementation of the General Treaty in Germany, with which the Western powers wish to compensate us for denying us equal participation in a free Europe, covers neither conferment of military sovereignty nor

even the right to conduct independent negotiations with our neighbours. *Die Gegenwart*, a highly respected German journal, takes the view that Adenauer should not accept the granting of such sovereignty at this moment in time. Much more remains to be said. Fortunately, the Eastern bloc appears at the moment to have paused for breath in its policy of expansion, so that we in the West have time to find a way out of all this confusion. Meanwhile, nobody can forecast how long this period of grace which fate has given us will last.